

## 2008 MICHIGAN DEER FORECAST

### THE STATEWIDE FORECAST

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There are changes to deer hunting regulations that will impact deer hunters this year. Chronic wasting disease (CWD), an always fatal neurological disease of deer and elk, was confirmed in a privately-owned cervid (deer) facility in Kent County. The CWD Emergency Response Plan, adopted by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in 2002, requires a ban on all feeding and baiting of cervids within the peninsula where CWD is documented. This baiting ban will help to prevent the potential spread of CWD. The DNR is also increasing surveillance for CWD. The CWD response plan calls for additional surveillance of wild deer in Kent and adjacent counties. A nine-township CWD Surveillance Zone (CSZ) in Kent County has been delineated and includes the townships of Tyrone, Solon, Nelson, Sparta, Algoma, Courtland, Alpine, Plainfield, and Cannon. All deer taken from the CSZ must be tested for CWD. Heads from these deer must be taken to one of the deer check stations inside the CSZ so samples can be submitted for testing. Hunters harvesting deer outside of the CSZ and taking their deer to a DNR deer check station may also be asked to donate the deer head for CWD testing.

Another change that impacts deer hunting in the Upper Peninsula (UP), is a “hunter’s choice buck tag” regulation. This regulation was passed by the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) with support from the UP Whitetails Association of Marquette County. Hunters must decide, before purchasing their deer license, if they wish the opportunity to take one or two legally antlered deer. Those wishing the opportunity to shoot two bucks must purchase a combination license. Both bucks have antler point restrictions. One buck must have one antler with at least three antler points; the other buck must have one antler with at least four antler points. A legal point is at least one inch long and longer than it is wide. Those choosing to purchase a firearm deer license or an archery deer license, or both, are limited to taking one legally antlered buck, with no antler point restrictions, all seasons combined. See the *2008 Hunting and Trapping Guide* for additional information on this regulation, which only pertains to hunting in the UP. The guide may be found on the DNR Web site at [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr).

Deer are not evenly distributed across the state. Every year hunters only a few miles apart have very different experiences observing and harvesting deer. Even in the UP, where there are fewer deer, deer hunters should find 2008 very similar to 2007.

### Upper Peninsula

The 2007-2008 winter had a negative impact on the deer herd in much of the UP. There was some mortality associated with deep snow and severe weather, particularly among the previous spring’s fawns. The number of 1½-year-old bucks in the UP is expected to be down from previous years. In addition, as the winter was severe enough to impact pregnant does, there are likely to be fewer fawns in the herd as well. Because of the anticipated impacts from last winter, fewer antlerless deer licenses are available for 2008.

The drier than normal spring and summer reduced the available herbaceous vegetation, which is expected to result in a reduction in antler development this year. On the positive side, mast production (fruit and nuts) in the UP appears to be very good this year. The plentiful mast, where available, will provide excellent nutrition for the upcoming winter.

More deer will be found in the southern UP near Lake Michigan, than in the northern UP near Lake Superior. However, hunters should expect to see fewer deer throughout the UP than they saw during the last few years.

Remember to review the new buck hunting regulations for the UP before purchasing your deer license.

### **Northern Lower Peninsula**

The deer population for the Northern Lower Peninsula (NLP) is expected to be higher than it has been in the last few years. The winter weather of 2007-08 does not appear to have impacted the overall deer herd. Deer came through winter in good condition. "Fawn production appeared to be good this spring," said DNR Wildlife Biologist Larry Visser of Cadillac. The number of antlerless deer licenses has been increased in the NLP, with more areas open than last year.

Some deer management units (DMU) have antlerless licenses available for the first time in several years, where the goal is to maintain the current deer population. The increase in deer population is primarily on private land, so only private land antlerless licenses are offered in these DMUs this year.

Mast production is spotty across the NLP; hunting is likely to be most productive in locations where apples can be found.

Bovine tuberculosis (TB) continues to be a concern in the northeast corner of the NLP. "There is a particular need for deer samples from Iosco, Ogemaw, Roscommon, and Crawford Counties and hunters are urged to come to any DNR check station to submit heads for the TB and CWD surveillance efforts," said DNR Wildlife Biologist Tim Reis of Gaylord. "Slow but important progress is being made in the effort to control TB in deer and it is important for hunters to continue to observe baiting and feeding restrictions in the TB management areas and to harvest at least as many antlerless deer as bucks."

### **Southern Lower Peninsula**

The amount of corn standing in the Southern Lower Peninsula (SLP) always impacts deer hunting. Hunters tend to have the most success when approximately 25 percent of the corn is still in the field. If half or more of the corn remains in the field, hunters will likely see fewer deer. If all the corn is picked before Nov. 15, deer change their patterns and hunters will need to look in swamps and woodlots for deer. What takes place in the next three weeks will help determine how the season goes.

But there will be plenty of deer. Deer populations in the SLP are stable to slightly increased this fall and continue to be well above goal despite increasingly liberal antlerless deer harvest regulations. As a result, a special five-day antlerless deer firearm hunt was held on private land across all of southern Michigan earlier this fall.

Early season participation was good, but hunters are still encouraged to take antlerless deer this fall. "Landowners and hunters both play a critical role in deer management," said DNR Wildlife Biologist Sara Schaefer of Plainwell. "Working together, we can support responsible antlerless deer harvest and reduce ecological damage, economic losses and social concerns in areas with an over-abundant deer herd."

Acorn production was generally fair to good across the region with few areas of failure. Wild fruit is bountiful.